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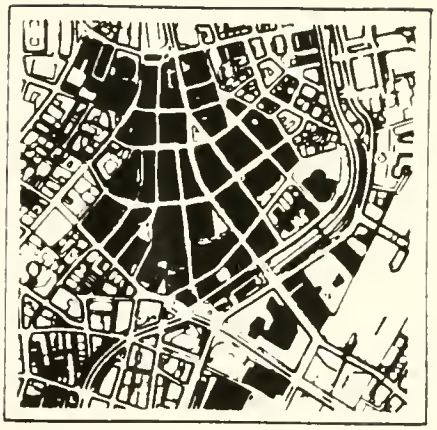

FINANCIAL DISTRICT STUDY

FINANCIAL DISTRICT PLAN

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Executive Summary

II. FRAMEWORK FOR THE PLAN

1. Historic Overview: Past and Present

- The area was first developed by European settlers in the 17th century. Early houses and commercial structures were built along two main streets, Hanover and King (State) Streets, which led to the naturally protected harbor on the eastern side of the land mass, below three hills, Trimount (Tremont). The western side was used as common grazing land for livestock.

- The original settlement prospered and soon outgrew its limitations. Those who had acquired sufficient wealth chose to move and resettle along Summer Street and near a new center for worship, Church Green. Grander residences with gardens and orchards were built, forming a new neighbood. In this manner the residential area shifted and the location of the commercial district was established downtown.

- Trace the history of waterfront development and the construction of wharves

- history and evolution of the area's street pattern

- history of commercial development

- Great Fire of 1872

- Growth of the Commercial Palace District:

The Commercial Palace District was principally occupied during the late 19th century by firms associated with two of Boston's major nineteenth century industries, clothing and dry goods and the shoe and leather trades. Boston served as the principal trading city for the mills of New England following the Civil War, and the dry goods district was the most active in the northeastern United States. The wealth and stability of these businesses account in part for the rapid recovery of the city after the devastating fire of 1872. The dry goods dealers were centered around Chauncy, Summer, Otis and Devonshire Streets, while the shoe and leather wholesalers and related dealers and manufacturers gravitated toward the Church Green area. From 1877 to 1883, the Church Green Building served as the headquarters for the New England Shoe and Leather Manufacturers and Dealers Association, a powerful trade organization which later occupied nearby buildings on Bedford Street. The district remained the focus of regional shoe and leather goods activity through the 20th century.

- decline of industry and commerce
- early efforts to renew area
- current condition

2. General Context

- overview of the district in context of the city

3. District Plan Overview

- planning premise: overbuilding in the downtown in the 1960s and 1970s has created the district's dense urban fabric with some resulting negative environmental impacts, e.g. wind and shadow, and negative effects on the area's pedestrian activity areas

- the preparation of a new plan and new zoning regulations provides the opportunity to limit/curtail new growth and to address the issues of improving the quality of the district's public realm

4. The Boston Economy

- role of the district in the city's present and future economy

III. ISSUES

1. Urban Design, Planning and Development

Urban design issues, goals and objectives:

- improve the district's legibility by utilizing Post Office Square as a principal orientation device for pedestrian and vehicular traffic

- identify primary connector streets which relate directly to Post Office Square and extend through the district to the waterfront, linking the district with the Harborwalk waterfront promenade; identify secondary streets

- provide new through streets across the central artery to create a more legible street system (e.g. extend radiating streets such as India, Broad, Batterymarch, Oliver and Pearl Streets to the waterfront)

- reconnect the district to the waterfront, now separated by the Central Artery; recreate historic block parcels along the Artery and continue new building fabric through to the waterfront

- use underutilized spaces for development opportunities; focus on the improvement of street edges to create more comfortable urban spaces for pedestrian activity at the ground level

- enhance the pedestrian environment by extending the system of public arcades and through block connections in new development projects, in both new construction and renovations or rooftop additions

- provide increased and more continuous ground level retail activity to enhance the pedestrian environment

- maintain and create view corridors to the waterfront

- preserve and rehabilitate historic buildings which contribute to the architectural character and human scale of the district

- develop guidelines for rooftop additions that are specific to the district's predominant building type

- provide recommendations for infrastructure and streetscape improvements

- conduct environmental studies to document existing wind and shadow conditions; incorporate wind and shadow standards in the new zoning regulations which can reduce and/or mitigate any observable negative environmental conditions

- provide new development guidelines which respond to the district's existing environmental constraints

2. Housing and Neighborhood Opportunities

- assess housing in the district and recommend projected housing requirements, if appropriate

3. Transportation and Access

- study existing parking conditions and project future parking needs

- improve vehicular access for planned garage locations

- improve transit access and regulation of traffic flow

- study potential off-street loading capabilities

- provide better vehicular and pedestrian access through district to the waterfront

- provide safer and more comfortable intersections at Dewey Square for both vehicular and pedestrian traffic en route to/from South Station

4. Open Space/Public Realm

- enhance the district's network of public spaces

- provide streetscape improvements to enhance the pedestrian environment

- extend pedestrian network to include through-block connections and incorporate the area's historic street and alley patterns

5. Historic Preservation

Policy Goals:

- preserve the district's existing historic buildings which contribute to the architectural character of the district
- provide design guidelines for roof-top additions specific to the district's predominant building type

- Custom House District

The Custom House District is an example of mixed commercial architecture that reflects Boston's development as a major mercantile city. The district represents an architectural environment of great variety in form, scale, materials and styles. Constructed throughout a hundred year period, the changing techniques and attitudes of development are reflected in the variety of lot sizes, building technology, scale, and architectural treatment. This variety creates a commercial district of contrasts, with an irregular historic street pattern, well defined vistas, and a successful balance of architectural styles.

Originally State Street and its extension, Long Wharf, plus Kilby and Batterymarch Streets converged at the water's edge near the early wharves and a cluster of small buildings. State Street, in existence since Boston's founding, was extended to Long Wharf in 1710. This street and active pier formed the main link from the waterfront to Washington Street, the central axis to the neck. Chatham Street was laid in 1825 as part of the Quincy Market development to improve market facilities at Fanueil Hall. The resulting six new streets were lined with stores and warehouses to accommodate the overflow from Merchant's Row (laid in 1708).

In 1805 the Broad Street Association led by Uriah Cotting, with Charles Bulfinch as planner, began a development which altered the colonial waterfront north and south of Long Wharf. With landfill operations south of Long Wharf the Association created a street pattern dominated by two wide streets, Broad and India, which followed the contours of the harbor and were crossed by smaller access streets. Together with the contiguous areas of the Markets, Fanueil Hall and the financial area on State Street, this expanded district became the center of Boston's merchant activities through the early years of the 19th century. The Custom House District is significant as an example of foresighted urban planning by the Broad Street Associates, which allowed for the evolution of a district of commercial architecture reflective of a growing and prosperous mercantile Boston.

The Federal style buildings on Broad and Milk Streets are the sole surviving examples of the planned effort by Charles Bulfinch to create a design for the waterfront commercial area. Building requirements were specified to create a unified and cohesive pattern of development which is still apparent today. The low scale, massing, and fenestration of the Federal style is particularly noteworthy in this district, juxtaposed with the later, more monumental styles of architecture.

o Commercial Palace District

The Commercial Palace District is located at the junction of Boston's Washington Street\Downtown Crossing retail, Midtown Cultural, and the Financial Districts. Winthrop Square and Church Green - the historic name for the Bedford and Summer Street intersection - are important focal points in the district. The district includes sixty commercial buildings lining Summer and Franklin Streets within an area loosely defined by the boundary streets of Hawley, Chauncy, Bedford, Lincoln, and Devonshire Streets.

The area is characterized by a wealth of low scale nineteenth century masonry commercial buildings. Over one half of the buildings in the district date from the years immediately following the Great Fire of 1872, when the downtown was reconstructed with commercial "palaces". The commercial buildings are typically four to six stories with facades of granite, marble, sandstone and brick, in a variety of styles including Italian Renaissance, Neo-Grec and Panel Brick. Despite the stylistic plurality that was characteristic of the late 19th century, these buildings form a strikingly cohesive 19th century urban streetscape due to similarities in construction dates, scale, materials, fenestration pattern, and streetwall plane.

The district's distinctive organic winding street pattern dates back to the colonial period. Although the streets were widened following the Great Fire, the historic street pattern was not significantly altered; the irregular intersections at Church Green and Winthrop Square call attention to the evolutionary pattern of the area's streets. Similarly the curve of Franklin Street intersected by Arch Street is a fragmentary reminder of the original Tontine Crescent, a residential crescent block planned by Charles Bulfinch in the 1790s.

Prior to the mid-19th century, the Commercial Palace District was notable not as a business area but as one of the city's fashionable residential neighborhoods. The streets were lined with giant elms and stately brick Federal style mansions occupied by wealthy and aristocratic families. At the intersection of Summer and Bedford Streets stood the granite New South Church, an octagon plan building designed by Charles Bulfinch and built in 1814. However, the area's proximity to the waterfront soon

underscored its commercial desirability. This factor coupled with the new availability of land in the prestigious residential Back Bay area in the 1860s, led to the rapid transformation of the district from residential to commercial uses. Lastly In 1872, the Great Fire obliterated all traces of the area's residential history.

The Commercial Palace District is of major architectural and historical significance for its surviving 19th century fabric in Boston's downtown commercial core, much of which dates from the rebuilding of this area after the Great Fire of November 9-10, 1872. The fire began in the basement of Number 83-85 Summer Street, and swept through the center of Boston's business area destroying 776 properties located within the current boundaries of the Commercial Palace District.

The fire-ravaged area was quickly rebuilt and in several years evolved into a district with imposing masonry facades. Described in a contemporary newspaper account as "the new palaces of Boston merchants," these post-fire buildings include distinguished examples of 1870s architectural styles such as Italianate (e.g. the Beebe-Weld Building at One Winthop Square, 40-46 Summer Street, and 72-74 Franklin Street), Neo-Grec (e.g. the Church Green Building at 105-113 Summer, 62-64 Summer, 66-72 Summer, and 83-87 Summer Street), Panel Brick (e.g. the Wigglesworth Building at 89-93 Franklin and 211-215 Devonshire Streets, the Kennedy Store at 28-38 Summer Street?), and Victorian Gothic (e.g. the Bedford Building at 89-103 Bedford and 17 Lincoln Streets, and 91-101 Arch Street).

Although the detailing may vary with each building, the architecture of the district exhibits a remarkable uniformity and consistency of materials, scale, and streetwall plane, due to the rapid reconstruction of the area and the involvement of several Boston architects each of whom were responsible for designing several buildings in the city's new downtown. Additionally the majority of the post-fire buildings incorporated technological and structural innovations in an attempt to produce buildings which were fire resistant. The Commercial Palace District is also notable for the quality of its storefronts, particularly those along Kingston Street. In most cases the original cast iron or carved stone piers remain intact.

The architectural significance of the Commercial Palace District is augmented considerably by the fact that it contains several important and representative works by some of Boston's most prominent late 19th century architects, including Gridley J.F. Bryant (41-47 Franklin, 57-63 Franklin, and 65-71 Franklin Street), Charles A. Cummings and Willard T. Sears (the Bedford Building, and 72-74 Franklin Street), William Ralph Emerson and Carl Fehmer (the Beebe-Weld Building, Kennedy's Block, and the Church Green Building), William Ware and Henry Van Brunt (137-139 Summer Street), and Peabody and Stearns (91-101 Arch Street).

Later buildings of additional and particular significance in the district include the Proctor Building at 100-106 Bedford Street, Boston Safe Deposit and Trust Company at 86-102 Franklin Street, and the Columbian National Life Insurance Building at 77-83 Franklin Street.

6. Land Use

- study existing land use patterns and recommend projected land use goals

7. Economy

- define the role of the district in the future downtown economy
- define public benefits to be derived from new development in the district: day care, jobs linkage, housing linkage, etc.

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IV. ACHIEVING THE PLAN

1. Zoning

- define height standards, land use, floor area ratio, setbacks, massing, for the district

2. Implementation

- community review process
- approval process

V. THE DISTRICT PLANS

- prepare plans and recommendations for specific areas and parcels within the district

VI. APPENDICES

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